

Rethinking President's Month Projects through Presidential Library Websites

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Throughout the month of February, children will be descending on the school library to find books about their favorite United States presidents.

Unfortunately, this pilgrimage is likely to end with a copy-and-paste report featuring Abraham Lincoln and a log cabin. It's time to rethink the resources and projects associated with our study of the presidency.

Sixty years ago Congress passed the Presidential Libraries Act of 1955 to preserve the documents and artifacts of the presidents. The twentieth-century presidents are associated with this National Archive and Records Administration (NARA) Cooperative Program <<http://www.archives.gov/presidential-libraries/>>. In addition, many of the earlier presidents also have libraries associated with nonprofit organizations and foundations. These libraries, archives, and museums contain outstanding online exhibits, digital collections, and educational resources.

Let's explore ways these resources can help build engaging learning environments for youth.

EXPLORE DIGITAL EXHIBITS AND COLLECTIONS

Many of the presidential websites contain information about exhibits and collections, but the digital reproductions of the materials aren't available through the Internet. Be sure to look for the

online exhibits and digital collections.

The Online Exhibits <<http://www.nixonlibrary.gov/virtuallibrary/onlineexhibits.php>> at the Nixon library focus on topics of interest to youth such as state gifts, when Richard Nixon met Elvis, and the Watergate file. Information and photos from the exhibits are available. The Gerald R. Ford Presidential Digital Library <<http://www.fordlibrarymuseum.gov/library/docs.asp>> features categories making it easy to access information on particular aspects of Ford's presidency, such as foreign affairs.

Dealing with a huge online collection can be overwhelming for students. For example, Franklin <<http://www.fdrlibrary.marist.edu/archives/collections/franklin/>> is a digital collection that includes 17 million documents related to the Franklin D. Roosevelt presidency. Introduce students to the common search tools and options. Teach search strategies for using digital collections.

Many of the presidential libraries provide direct links to popular documents. These can be particularly useful for younger students with beginner skills in searching digital collections. The Eisenhower Presidential Library, Museum, and Boyhood Home website <http://www.eisenhower.archives.gov/research/online_documents.html> provides sets of military, presidential, and declassified documents. Eisenhower's appointment books are also available, so students can check his appointments against important historical events. The digital collections at the John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum <<http://www.jfklibrary.org/Research/Search-Our-Collections/Browse-Digital-Collections.aspx>> and the William J. Clinton Presidential Library & Museum <<http://www.clintonlibrary.gov/digital-library.html>> are divided into areas based on the type of document.

Collaborate with teachers on ideas for revisiting the traditional term paper. For an alternative assignment, involve youth in selecting key primary source documents from one of these digital collections and integrating them into a presentation using an online tool such as Prezi <<http://prezi.com/>>.

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PRIMARY SOURCE DOCUMENTS

Analyzing primary source documents is an important skill across



Figure 2. Franklin digital collection.



Figure 1. National Archives Presidential Libraries and Museums.



Figure 3. Prezi project.

the curriculum. Work with teachers to design assignments that focus on particular types of documents.

The Laws and Regulations <<http://www.archives.gov/presidential-libraries/laws/>> related to presidential documents are fascinating to explore. A study of the presidents is an excellent opportunity to explore three types of documents related to the presidency: executive orders, proclamations, and administrative orders. Create a school library display featuring examples of all three. Design an interactive bulletin board where youth can test their skills categorizing documents. To learn more about the three types of documents, go to <http://www.archives.gov/presidential-libraries/research/guide.html>.

The Under His Hat <<http://www.underhishat.org/>> website is a digitization project focusing on thematic, primary source materials associated with Abraham Lincoln. Correlated with the Common Core standards, the materials include hands-on activities, vocabulary, and high-level questions to explore.



Figure 4. Under His Hat website.

A word cloud is a fun way to visualize the key ideas in a primary source document. Students can copy and paste the text into word cloud software such as Wordle <<http://www.wordle.net/>> or Tagxedo <<http://www.tagxedo.com/>>.



Figure 5. Word cloud for Kennedy's moon speech.

PHOTOGRAPHS

With so much information available, a study of the presidency can be overwhelming for some youth. Use photos as a way to focus on specific events. For example, ask students to select three photos and use them as a basis for their visual report. The Kennedy library <<http://www.jfklibrary.org/JFK/Media-Gallery.aspx>> has a media gallery with categories of photos such as campaign, space, inauguration, and the first family. The Clinton library <<http://clintonlibrary.gov/photogallery.html?galAlbum=30>> has a similar gallery structure.

Use a tool like Thinglink <<https://www.thinglink.com/>> or SpeakingImage <<http://www.speakingimage.org/>> to create hotspots on images to add notations, web links, images, and videos.



Figure 6. JFK campaign poster in SpeakingImage with annotations.

CARTOONS

Cartoons are a fun way to explore the American presidency and teach visual literacy. Many of the digital collections, such as the Ulysses S. Grant Collection <<http://digital.library.msstate.edu/cdm/search/collection/usgrant/searchterm/cartoon/field/format/mode/any/conn/and/order/nosort>>, contain cartoons. Build an interactive bulletin board featuring presidential cartoons. Involve youth in discussing how the car-

toons represent key issues of the presidency.

The Harry S. Truman Library & Museum <http://www.trumanlibrary.org/whistle-stop/cartoons/cartoon_central.htm> contains a page featuring cartoons and lesson ideas. A comic book titled *The Story of Harry S. Truman* was published in 1948 and is available online.



Figure 7. A page from *The Story of Harry S. Truman* comic book.

Ask students to build a comic book focusing on their president. Software such as Comic Life and some online tools allow students to insert historical photos and primary source documents to build their own comic books.

AUDIO

Hearing a president's voice can be a powerful experience for learners. Franklin D. Roosevelt <<http://docs.fdrlibrary.marist.edu/FIRES90.HTML>> was known for his fireside chats shared on radio. The Clinton Library <<http://clintonlibrary.gov/radio.html>> contains a complete set of Clinton's fireside chats to explore.

Use an online tool like Voki <<http://voki.com/>> to create your own presidential chats. Students can use excerpts from real audio speeches or invent their own.

The Kennedy Library and the Truman Library make podcasts available on topics of interest through iTunes.

VIDEOS

Some young people forget that video hasn't always been around. Although original film might not be available for a particular president, other materials may exist. Many of the presidential libraries have video collections or YouTube channels. The Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library and Museum maintains a YouTube channel <<https://www.youtube.com/user/PresLincolnMuseum>>. In celebration of the 150th anniversary of the Gettysburg Address, they're showcasing different versions of the immortal speech. Involve youth in comparing some of these different versions. The Ronald Reagan Presidential Foundation YouTube channel <<http://youtu.be/5MDFX-dNtsM>> includes his famous "Berlin Wall" speech. The Lyndon Baines Johnson Library and Museum <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC-wRQxHVCyShQyky_HzHdZEq> and the Nixon Presidential Library & Museum <<https://www.youtube.com/user/Richard-NixonLibrary>> also have outstanding YouTube channels.

Many libraries provide an overview and video for key speeches. For instance, the Kennedy Library <<http://www.jfklibrary.org/JFK/Historic-Speeches.aspx>> provides both background information and the original speech. The videos at the Clinton Library <<http://clintonlibrary.gov/videos.html>> can be downloaded. This makes them easy to incorporate into class projects.

George Washington's Mount Vernon <<http://www.mountvernon.org/animated-washington/yorktown/>> contains a series of animated presentations on the Yorktown campaign.

FOCUS ON THEMES

Many of the country's most important accomplishments took many presidencies to accomplish. For instance, the Americans with Disabilities Act, signed on July 26,

1990, was the culmination of decades of work. The National Archives <<http://www.archives.gov/research/americans-with-disabilities/>> has organized the primary source documents related to this important law.

The Presidential Timeline <<http://www.presidentialtimeline.org/>> provides an overview to the presidents of the twentieth century. The Topics page <<http://www.presidentialtimeline.org/#/exhibits/all>> lists themes like civil and human rights, the cold war, and energy and the environment that cross multiple presidents.

Rather than asking students to write a standard chronology about a president, help them focus on some aspect of their president's time in office. For instance, the Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Library and Museum <<http://www.fdrlibrary.marist.edu/aboutfdr/specialtopics.html>> contains a special topics section focusing on key events and topics of interest, such as the attack on Pearl Harbor and Roosevelt's physical disability. Students working on the Lyndon B. Johnson administration could focus on the theme of Tragedy and Transition <<http://www.lbjlibrary.org/exhibits/tragedy-and-transition>>, and those working on the Nixon administration could explore the Moon Landing <<http://www.nixonlibrary.gov/forkids/speeches-forkids/moonlanding.php>>.

Many of the presidential libraries link to digital collections that are organized by topic. The Foreign Relations of the United States project <<http://uwdc.library.wisc.edu/collections/FRUS>> contains the official historical records of major foreign policy decisions from 1861 through 1960.

USE STUDENT MATERIALS

Particularly for elementary children, be sure to look for a student section at the presidential library websites. These areas often focus on topics and activities of particular interest to youth. The FDR Library <<http://www.fdrlibrary.marist.edu/education/students.html>> includes biographies, activities, an interactive chronology, and ideas for doing research projects.

Use the student materials found in the libraries to jumpstart your own project. For instance, watch The Roosevelt Rap <<http://youtu.be/2sfftlJx9Vk>>. Then involve youth in creating their own music with a presidential theme.

The Truman Library <<http://www.trumanlibrary.org/whistlestop/applications/dilemma/>> provides an interactive game focusing on the world of spies. Set in 1945, students become Soviet agents and enter the world of foreign and defense policy. Involve students in evaluating this game and building their own game based on primary source documents.

Some students are difficult to motivate. Seek out engaging content that include images, audio, and video to bring a presidency alive, such as those at the Kennedy Library <<http://www.jfklibrary.org/Exhibits/Interactive-Exhibits.aspx>>. The JFK50 project <<http://www.jfk50.org/>> celebrates the Kennedy presidency through key quotes, images, audio, and video. The project also incorporates time lines, clips from interviews, and other resources. After viewing this exhibit, involve youth in thinking about how they might use PowerPoint to create this type of interactive exhibit for another president.



Figure 8. JFK50 Interactive.

The Sea of Liberty project <<https://seaofliberty.org>> allows students to explore, create, and share their work related to Thomas Jefferson. Students face a series of challenges where they are asked to make a word cloud, collage, time line, and video.

INFORMATIONAL READING

Many students need help with information-reading skills. Seek out quality informational texts related to specific presidents

that go beyond the common presidential biographies. Many of these texts weave in primary source documents, including photographs, presidential papers, and other fascinating pieces of history. Hoover Heads <<http://www.hoover.archives.gov/hooverhead>> contains nine interesting stories about President Herbert Hoover. One story features a photo of Hoover's German shepherd and a touching letter sent to the president after the dog's death.



Figure 9. Herbert Hoover and King Tut.

The Eisenhower Library <http://www.eisenhower.archives.gov/all_about_ike/abilene_years.html> provides a dozen pages in a section called "All About Ike." Including primary resources, time lines, family trees, and quotes, these pages are interesting and easy to read.

Use these biographical pages to provide short, focused reading experiences. Involve youth in reading these pages then creating questions for others to answer. Since many of these websites contain four to seven pages of information, consider doing this activity in small groups, with each student working on a specific page. For instance, the Nixon Library pages <<http://www.nixononlibrary.gov/thelife/>> include five main sections.

The digital encyclopedia at Washington's Library <<http://www.mountvernon.org/research-collections/digital-encyclo->

[edia/](http://www.mountvernon.org/research-collections/digital-encyclopedia/)> contains dozens of short articles related to the colonial and founding eras.

Young readers will enjoy an informational e-book about Thomas Jefferson <http://www.monticello.org/sites/default/files/inline-pdfs/exploring_monticello_0.pdf>.

A fun informational reading activity involves the use of flip books. The George W. Bush Presidential Library and Museum <<http://www.georgewbushlibrary.smu.edu/Photos-and-Videos/Flip-Book/World-React/World-React.aspx>> contains an online flip book showing the world's reactions to 9/11. Students can create their own flip books using such online tools as PageFlip <<http://www.pageflip-flap.com/>>, FlipSnack <<http://www.flipsnack.com/>>, and ISSUU <<http://issuu.com/>>.

TIME LINES

Many libraries provide visual ways to help youth as well as the general public better understand the presidency. The Franklin D. Roosevelt Library <<http://www.fdrlibrary.marist.edu/daybyday/timeline/>> and the L. B. Johnson Library <<http://www.lbjlibrary.org/lyndon-baines-johnson/timeline>> have outstanding interactive time lines. Use these models to inspire youth to create their own time lines. Online tools such as Timeglider <<http://timeglider.com/>>, Tiki-Toki <<http://www.tiki-toki.com/>>, Dipity <<http://www.dipity.com/>>, and TimeToast <<http://www.timetoast.com/>> can be used for these types of projects. Ask students to select ten key events to add to a time line. It's easy to incorporate photos and primary source documents into their time line.

Another way to think about chronology is through a president's journals, diaries,



Figure 10. The White House Diary from the JFK Library.

and appointment books. The White House Diary <<http://whd.jfklibrary.org/Diary/>> at the JFK Library provides a wonderful overview of key events. Many of the pages even contain audio from the day.

APPS

Increasingly the presidential libraries are providing content through apps. The Johnson Library <<https://itunes.apple.com/us/app/lbj-presidential-library/id594804017>> provides an app designed to enhance exploration of the library and museum. Apps are also available for the George W. Bush and Ronald Reagan libraries.



Figure 11. LBJ presidential library app.

To The Brink <<https://itunes.apple.com/us/app/to-brink-jfk-cuban-missile/id570032141>> is an app focusing on JFK and the Cuban Missile Crisis.

ADAPT EDUCATIONAL MATERIALS

Most of the presidential libraries provide educational materials such as lesson plans. For instance, the Jimmy Carter Presiden-

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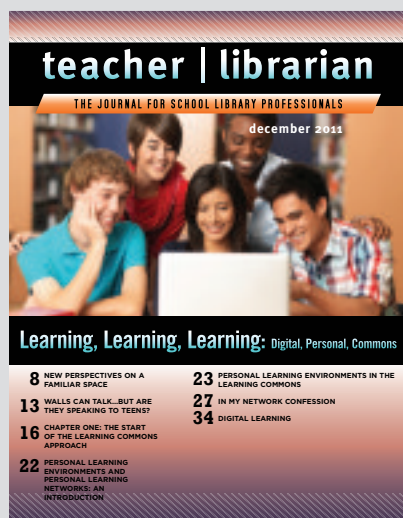
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tial Library & Museum <<http://www.jimmycarterlibrary.gov/education/resources.phtml>> provides nineteen curriculum units focusing on all aspects of the Carter presidency.

The World War II Spy Kit <http://www.eisenhower.archives.gov/education/teacher_resources/spy_kit.html> at the Eisenhower Library contains everything needed for an engaging learning experience with primary source documents. The project includes both teaching materials and documents that can be viewed online or printed. Use this spy kit as a model for creating your own engaging activity with primary sources by another president.

Looking for a great tool for AP history courses? The Age of Jefferson <<https://itunes.apple.com/us/course/age-of-jefferson/id808855104>> is an online course. All the materials are available for free through iTunes.

JOIN SOCIAL MEDIA AND CONTESTS

Use social media as a fun way to follow the activities of a presidential library. The Truman Library <<https://www.facebook.com/TrumanPresidentialLibrary>> has a popular Facebook site, with over ten thousand followers. The postings often include primary source documents, trivia, and questions.

Blogs are another interesting way to keep up to date on the activities of presidential libraries. For instance, In Roosevelt History <<http://fdrlibrary.wordpress.com/>> is the blog of the FDR Library. During the past year, they've been posting lots of interesting articles about the PBS special *The Roosevelts*.

Presidents are known for their wonderful speeches and words of wisdom. Involve youth in writing about topics that they think are important. The Profile in Courage essay contest <<http://www.jfklibrary.org/Education/Profile-in-Courage-Essay-Contest.aspx>> is an annual program that encourages young people to write an original essay that demonstrates an understanding of the political courage described in the book *Profiles in Courage*. Join the Facebook <<https://www.facebook.com/pages/>

John-F-Kennedy-Profile-in-Courage-Essay-Contest/368548716012> page to keep track of activities related to this contest.

Other libraries also sponsor contests, such as the Art and Essay Contest <http://bushlibrary.tamu.edu/education/art_essay_contest/> at the George H. W. Bush Library.

CONCLUSION

Besides the resources at the presidential library websites, there are other useful online resources for studying presidents, such as:

American Experience: The Presidents <<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/collections/presidents/>>

American Presidency Project <<http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/>>

C-SPAN's Presidential Libraries <<http://presidentallibraries.c-span.org/>>

Miller Center <<http://millercenter.org/president>>

For a list of links to the presidential libraries, go to Wikipedia <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Presidential_library#List_of_presidential_libraries>.

Adapted from the professional development workshop "Beyond Lincoln and the Log Cabin: Presidential Libraries in the Classroom."